



BEST BUY DRUGS

Free Guidance for Consumers on Prescription Medicines



NEWS UPDATE

ConsumerReportsHealth.org/BestBuyDrugs

Holiday heartburn: Why you may not need "the purple pill"

As we gear up for the holiday season with food and drink aplenty, many of us will suffer from heartburn — about 15 million people have it on any given day — especially those over the age of 50 or women who are pregnant.

If you find yourself with tell-tale signs of heartburn, your first and best bet is to try an inexpensive over-the-counter antacid like Maalox, Mylanta, Rolaids, Tums, (or generic) or drugs like Pepcid AC or Zantac 150, or generic (known as H2 blockers).

But if you suffer from heartburn twice a week or several months on end, you may have GERD, short for gastroesophageal reflux disease, a condition that makes you prone to acid reflux, and you should see a doctor. People with GERD are often recommended a Proton-Pump Inhibitor (PPI) drug. PPIs are effective and safe to treat more frequent heartburn or GERD, but beware: the price tag could drain your budget.

Last year, U.S. consumers and their insurance companies spent \$4.8 billion on Nexium, one of six prescription Proton-Pump Inhibitors currently available, making "the purple pill" the second highest-selling drug in 2008, behind Lipitor. Indeed, Nexium, Prevacid and other expensive PPIs have likely been over-prescribed.

But here's the good news: A new [Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs report on drugs to treat heartburn, GERD and gastric ulcers](#), finds that no one Proton-Pump Inhibitor (PPI) drug works better than any other.

If you do need a PPI drug, you could save about \$200 a month by asking your doctor if one of several alternatives to Nexium, such as our *Best Buy Drugs* selections, Prilosec OTC or its generic version, omeprazole OTC (which costs less than \$1 a day) would work as well for you. Also, Prevacid, a prescription PPI, will be available in mid-November without a prescription. We expect that the new over-the-counter Prevacid24HR will be comparable in price to Prilosec OTC.

Drug safety

New blood-thinning drug is effective, but has risks

A newly approved drug, prasugrel, (Effient) thins the blood faster, more consistently, and more powerfully than the standard drug, clopidogrel (Plavix). But it is also more likely to cause potentially fatal bleeding.

Doctors prescribe blood-thinning medication (also known as antiplatelets), to reduce clot-forming blood cells that can block an artery after an angioplasty (also known as percutaneous coronary intervention or PCI), in which cardiologists inflate a tiny balloon inside a blocked artery to prevent or stop a heart attack.

While the drugs help prevent clots, antiplatelet blood thinners have a downside: they increase the chance of hemorrhages — and prasugrel seems to raise that risk more than the approved dose of

clopidogrel (Plavix).

A heart attack is a medical emergency, and the decision about which drug to take can be complex, so you may have no say in which medication you take, at least at first. But, [read on to understand what you can do if time permits](#), even after you've started taking an antiplatelet drug.

For additional information on more than [200 prescription drugs](#), alternatives to high-priced drugs and Best Buy selections for the most common, chronic medical conditions, visit [ConsumerReportsHealth.org/BestBuyDrugs](#).

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